

Yash Kilam: Teenage humanitarian advocates for those with disabilities



San Francisco, California Aug 23, 2022 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - While most 16-year-olds are focused on learning to drive and sleeping in on summer mornings, Yash Kilam of Fremont, California is keeping his full attention on helping others. The rising senior at Mission San Jose High School spends a great deal of his time researching and lobbying for legislation that protects and supports those with intellectual and developmental disabilities

It's a cause that hits close to home, he said. "When I was diagnosed with ADHD, I was told I was smart. But apparently not smart enough to know why I stood out like a sore thumb among my peers. I began to learn about disabilities and realized how inclusion is still a tall order," he said.

Yash said the social awkwardness he experienced as a young child inspired him to become a changemaker.

For his 10th birthday, instead of gifts, he asked his guests to contribute to his fundraiser for [Las Trampas](#), an organization dedicated to assisting individuals with developmental and neurological disabilities. Kilam raised \$4,000+ for the organization and was then invited to tour the facility to get a closer look at the technologies purchased with the help of the donation. There he met individuals who used a wheelchair, tube-feeding, and an alternative method of communication. His fundraising resulted in the acquisition of a Proloquo2Go touch operated learning device for non-verbal communication. "Upon suddenly having the world at his fingertips, Danny tried to say a joke using the keypad and he broke into an infectious laugh. Danny has cerebral palsy. Danny's joy was gratifying, humbling, and, above all, motivating. I had a connection in that moment, and I knew that all I wanted to do was help people," he said.

As Marcus Aurelius said, "Reject your sense of injury and the injury itself disappears." Who better to advocate for inclusion of people with neurological disabilities than someone who experienced firsthand? "The best sport coaches are those that have played the game," he said. Kilam found his calling. In high school, he pushed to start a club at his school that focused on advocating for those with neurological disabilities, but he said school student council turned his idea down twice.

After his club was rejected, Kilam decided to not give up and started the nonprofit [Disability Rights Association](#) in 2021 along with his club officers. Following the footsteps of his idol [Ed Roberts](#), he was determined to overturn any obstacle that will come in his way of advocating for disability rights. "Everything happens for a reason; one must not lose heart as one has to lose to win. With a nonprofit, we have a larger presence and many more opportunities to make a difference," he said

In less than a year, the nonprofit has garnered [3400 followers](#). "As the founder of the Disability Rights Association, a nonprofit dedicated to raising awareness and advocating for people with disabilities, I launch letter-writing and petition-signing campaigns with my team officers and our three thousand members," he said.

Kilam says as the nonprofit continues to gain strength, he never loses sight of the fact that there is so much more to do in terms of educating, informing, and assisting those with disabilities. His team wrote to House Representative Rohit Khanna, Senator Diane Emily Goldman, and Senator Alejandro Padilla to urge them to support the passage of bills imperative to the safety of students with disabilities. In their letters to elected officials, they demand allocation of federal funds for school personnel training specific to the needs of students with disabilities as well as the appointment of certified crisis intervention

personnel to make evidence-based decisions for misconduct of students with disabilities.

Inspired by the [Crip Camp](#) that gave us changemakers like activists Ed Roberts and [Judith Heumann](#) that collectively lead to advocate handicap access in public transport, the 504 education plan, the first disabled students union, and many more changes we now see, Yash plans to recruit students with neurological disabilities to form a support club to help peers through school life challenges. “We need to come together and stand strong,” he said. His team is initiating collaboration with local organizations like [PHP](#), [PACE](#), [DSP Berkeley](#) to form a large local network of students volunteering to helping students. “The social acceptance will help us feel good about ourselves, motivate us to advocate for change, and make school life fun and rewarding,” he said.

Yash may only be a high school student, but his message to his generation is to use passion to make a change in the world. “We are learning more about how to make our voices heard, exercise our civic duty, and strive to make the world more inclusive and a better place to live,” he said. Yash Kilam is confident that his generation has the grit and heart it will take to overcome obstacles toward disability rights.

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